

# THE



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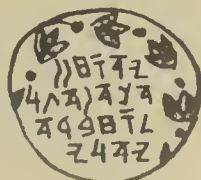
MEL WACKS, Editor • DR. BARUCH KANAEL, DR. EDWIN MENDELSSOHN, Contributing Editors

## THANKS . . .

Thanks to Professor Baruch Kanael, who spoke before a packed audience at our first public meeting in New York (we'll publish highlights in a future issue of THE AUGUR). Thanks for all of the encouraging words that I received in person in New York and in letters from our over 250 charter members. Thanks for the offer of future articles from Professor Kanael, Ed Janis, and Dr. Edwin Mendelssohn (whose magnificent exhibit of Judaea Capta Coins won a first prize at the American Israel Numismatic Association's convention). Thanks to charter members Dr. Robert Webber and Bristol Shutes for loaning us their excellent slides for reproduction as "Coins-of-the-Month." And thanks to Russ Rulau and Harold Flartey for the generous publicity.

The subject of Biblical Numismatics has obviously struck a responsive chord amongst collectors who are tired of the same old thing, of promotions and recently produced so-called "limited editions" with no true historic significance. So lastly, thanks for your support; it makes all of the hours necessary to produce THE AUGUR so rewarding.

Mel Wacks NLG  
Editor



Bronze Lepton of Yehochanan with full name on first line of inscription.

## Coin of the Month

### YEHOCHANAN'S "MITE"

THE HANDBOOK OF BIBLICAL NUMISMATICS refers briefly to the debate, that continues, whether Yehochanan was John Hyrcanus (135-104 BC) or his grandson Jonathan Hyrcanus II (67, 63-40 BC). I recently jokingly remarked that I am now convinced that **both** theories are correct! A detailed study of the metallurgical composition of Hasmonean coins by Arye Ben-David "proves that the percentage of copper in the coins steadily declines from one Hasmonean sovereign to the next. It would be in contradiction with the main trend if Hyrcanus II was the only one to increase the percentage of copper in some of his coins." Thus Ben-David concludes that Yehochanan was actually John Hyrcanus. However, in the recently published **ARCHAEOLOGICAL DISCOVERIES IN THE JEWISH QUARTER OF JERUSALEM**, Nathan Avigad's finds "confirm that no Hasmonean coins were struck prior to the reign of Alexander Jannaeus (103-76 BC)." Obviously we haven't heard the last on this subject yet.

Before I go any further, let me note an error in Table I, Attributions of Hasmonean Coins, and the inscription of Wacks No.9 in the HANDBOOK. Yehochanan's name in ancient Hebrew is misspelled, as a result of copying unquestioningly from Madden's century old work,

𐤙𐤓𐤕𐤕𐤕𐤕 should actually read 𐤙𐤓𐤕𐤕𐤕𐤕, similar to the inscription on our Coin of the Month, except that our lepton uses the form 𐤕 for vav . . . a variant of 𐤕

While this small bronze coin-type (Wacks No.9) is generally quite inexpensive, it is exceedingly difficult to locate a specimen that is perfectly centered, fully struck-up and with a complete inscription as is the case for this example.

The first thing that one notices when examining quantities of Hasmonean leptons (also called "mites") is that, aside from the obvious different names of HaCohen Gadol (the High Priest and the king), the inscriptions vary widely in style and form. Lines of lettering end indiscriminately . . . often breaking up words . . . and spelling may vary. For instance, the coin pictured as Wacks No.9 reads as follows:



→ ←

YHOCH	יהוה	Yehocha-
NNHCHN	נחמן	Nan HaCohen
GDOLVCH	גדול	Gadol VeChe-
VRHYH	ר' יהודה	ver HaYeh-
ODYM	ודם	udim

However our Coin of the Month has the king's full name on the first line, as well as other differences:

YHOCHNN	יהוחנן	Yehochanan
HCHNHGD	החנן הגדול	HaCohen HaGad-
LVCHVRH	ל' ח' ו' ר' ה'	o I VeChever Ha-
YHDY	יהודה	Yehudi

Madden's COINS OF THE JEWS listed 18 distinct variations of Yehochanan's inscriptions as long as 100 years ago. More recently Meshorer (JEWISH COINS, 1967) delineates four varieties of this coin - type - Meshorer No. 18, 18a, 26 ("blockstyle lettering usually incomplete or very primitively executed"), and 27 ("characterized by the unusual form of the letter 'H' which here appears as  $\aleph$ ). The inscription on this type is likewise incomplete and is full of mistakes"). But the ancient Jewish die engravers should not be overly faulted for these errors, since they were inscribing the dies using an alphabet that was antiquated and no longer in general use. The ancient Hebrew alphabet found on all Biblical Coins had been replaced by the modern "square" Hebrew (that is still in use) circa the 4th Century BC . . . at least 200 years before the first Hasmonean coins were produced.

In the Encyclopaedia Judaica, Dr. Uriel Rappaport of Haifa University writes about the expression "Chever Ha-Yehudim" (e.g. Community of the Jews) found on this and other small bronze leptons of the Hasmonean kings: "Some regard it as a council associated with the ruler, composed of aristocrats, priests and scholars; at a later period it was known as the Sanhedrin. Others take the phrase to refer to the nation as a whole. They compare the Chever Ha-Yehudim to the Great Assembly which was convened to endorse the establishment of Hasmonean rule in the time of Simeon the Hasmonean (142 B.C.E.; I Maccabees 14:25-49). Still others regard the name as a translation of some Greek term like 'The Commonwealth of the Jews.' No such body, however, is known to have existed."



Corona Triumphalis (Laurel Wreath) on Greek coin.

The laurel wreath surrounding the inscription evidently has no specific Judaic meaning, however it was a generally recognized symbol of victory in the ancient world. Laurel, a forest tree with aromatic leaves, is mentioned in Isaiah 44:14. The reverse design consists



Usual form of poppy



Pomegranate-like poppy



Pomegranates on shekel

of a roundish plant between two cornucopiae. The plant is usually referred to as a poppy . . . which still bloom in profusion in modern Israel's Sharon Valley. However, the coin plant, occasionally depicted with a three-pronged "crown", strongly resembles a pomegranate (compare it to the plant on the first Revolt Shekel). The cornucopia, the horn-of-plenty, has a long history of use on Jewish coins, as well as on Roman, Ptolemaic Egyptian and other coins of the ancient world. It was a symbol of abundance . . . the fertility of the land.



Cornucopiae depicted on coins of Ptolemaic Egypt, 181-146 BC (left), and Roman Palestine, 73 AD (right).

One of the most interesting features of this particular lepton from the collection of Museum Haaretz in Tel Aviv, is the tiny monogram  $\aleph$  below to the left of the cornocipiae. Such monograms are known to Meshorer - he catalogs this one as No.20 - but they are often overlooked by collectors and dealers alike. They are rare, worth about double or triple the value of the non-monogrammed coin of Yehochanan. It is speculated that this monogram is a contraction of  $\aleph$ , which in turn is an abbreviation of Antipater, father of Herod the Great, who had been in charge of the mint in the days of Hyrcanus II.

(M. Wacks)



The Seven Churches of Asia Minor



## SATAN'S SEAT

The Apostle John lists the seven churches to which his apocalyptic letters are addressed, all in the province of Asia: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea (Revelation 1:11). John was instructed, "And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write . . . I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is" (Rev. 2:12-13). What the apostle called "Satan's Seat" was the mystic cist which was kept in the Asclepium, the temple at Pergamos dedicated to the worship of Asclepius, the god of medicine. According to one tradition, Pergamos was colonized under the leadership of this ancient Pagan god: actually it was founded by remnants of the Persian Empire following the victory of Alexander the Great.

The mystic cist was a small box or basket carried in the processions at the Greek festivals of Demeter and Dionysus, containing the sacred things associated with the worship of these deities. This "cista mystica" appeared on a series of large silver coins - appropriately called CISTOPHORI - under the kings of the Pergamene dynasty from C. 200 to 48 BC. The sacred chest is depicted with a snake crawling from under its half open lid; on the reverse a large bow-case is flanked by two coiled snakes . . . a forerunner of the modern medical symbol. Charles Seltman (GREEK COINS) aptly describes these designs as "remarkably hideous," and goes on to state that the Cistophori "became the chief currency not only of the Pergamene kingdom but of all Asia Minor. The commercial advantages of such a uniform coinage were understood and widely appreciated in the ancient world, and they were issued in vast quantities. The ancient historian Livy recorded that in 190/189 BC, the Romans brought back booty of 960,000 Cistophori!



Cistophoric Tetradrachm of Pergamos, 200 - 133 BC.

It was nearly 150 years after the last Cistophori had been minted that John visited Pergamos. But it is not unlikely that this prolific coin was still to be found in circulation. If so, it would certainly have served to emphasize the "Seat of Satan," for the festival of Dionysius (called a Bacchanalia in John's time) featured all manner of debauchery and crime; the most horrible immoralities were practiced, the wildest frenzy indulged in.

The Cistophorus of Pergamos is still quite reasonably priced, selling for about \$100 in Very Fine condition. The city is now known as Bergama and is in modern Turkey. (M.Wacks)

## Bibliophile Corner

### THE JEWISH WAR

The author, Joseph ben Matthias, was born in 37 AD, the descendent of Jewish kings; he is far better known by his adopted Roman name, Flavius Josephus. Originally a young general in the First Revolt (66-70 AD), he was captured by the Roman general - later Emperor - Vespasian. At the time of his capture he predicted Vespasian's rise in power, and when this indeed came to pass Josephus was freed and became a favorite of the Emperor. Living until the year 100 AD, Josephus devoted much of his time to writing the history of the First Revolt and on other historic Jewish subjects. In this excerpt, he throws light on the only ancient Jewish coin to depict a living thing - an eagle (Wacks #24) - issued by Herod the Great (37-4 BC).



There were two rabbis in the City with a great reputation as exponents of national tradition, and for that reason held in the highest esteem by the whole nation — Judas the son of Sepphoraes and Matthias the son of Margalus. Many young students came to them for instruction in the laws; in fact they daily attracted a host of men in their prime. When they learnt that the king (Herod) was succumbing to his sickness of body and mind, they dropped a hint to their acquaintances that here was a wonderful chance to strike a blow for God and to pull down the works erected contrary to the laws of their fathers. Although it was unlawful to have in the Sanctuary images or portrait-busts or the likeness of any living thing, the king had put up over the Great Gate a golden eagle. This the rabbis now urged them to cut down, saying that even if danger was involved it was a glorious thing to die for the laws of their fathers: for those who came to such an end there was a sure hope of immortality and the eternal enjoyment of blessings, whereas the poor-spirited, knowing nothing of the rabbinical wisdom, through ignorance clung to life and chose death by disease rather than death by a righteous cause.

While they were preaching thus it was rumoured that the king was actually dying, so that the young men undertook the task with more confidence. At mid-day, when masses of people were walking about the Temple courts, they lowered themselves by stout ropes from the roof and began to cut down the golden eagle with axes. The news quickly reached the king's officer, who hurried to the spot with a large force, seized about forty young men and took them before the king. He began by asking them whether they had dared to cut down the golden eagle. They said they had. Who told them to do it? The law of their fathers. What made them so cheerful when they were about to be executed? The knowledge that they would enjoy greater blessings after their death. At this the king exploded with rage, and forgetting his sickness went out to address a public meeting. He attacked the men at great length as temple-robbers, who pleading the Law as an excuse had some ulterior purpose, and demanded their punishment for sacrilege. The people, fearing punitive measures on a wide front, begged him to punish first those who had suggested the attempt, then those who had been caught in the act, and to take no action against the rest. The king reluctantly agreed: those who had lowered themselves from the roof together with the rabbis he burnt alive; the rest of the men seized he handed over to his attendants for execution.



# Numystery Number Four

## EZEKIAL'S VISION

A paper prepared for the International Numismatic Congress,  
New York, 1973

By MEL WACKS

For almost 125 years one of the earliest coins of Judaea has been the subject of numismatic speculation. The first reference to the coin, in the British Museum Collection, was in 1846, when Duc de Luynes attributed it to Sohar, presently called Oman, in south-east Arabia. The seated figure was ascribed as Jupiter Baal and the isolated head was considered a "colossal profile of a satyre". The ancient Hebrew legend **יְהוָה** was read as Y-H-O.

The inscription was interpreted in 1881 by Dr. Ginsburg as Jehu, King of Israel; in 1892, M. Clermont Ganneau declared that Jehovah was the correct translation. By 1914, G. F. Hill, Curator of Coins at the British Museum, had already proposed that the famous Shekels be re-attributed from Simon Maccabeus to the First Revolt, but he had nothing new to add to the so-called Y-H-O coin. Hill calls the head a "bald-headed bearded mask".

Another twenty years were to pass (a total of almost a century after the coin's discovery) before E. L. Sukenik (JPOS XIV, 1934), correctly ascribed the legend to Y-H-D, Yehud — the official Aramaic name of the province Judaea in Persian times.

Relfenberg, in his standard work "Ancient Jewish Coins" (1940), still used Hill's 1914 description of the "bald-headed mask", as does the latest reference work — Ya'akov Meshorer's "Jewish Coins of the Second Temple Period" (1967) — where it is called "a small mask". Meshorer continues: "Many scholars have sought to discern here a representation of God seated on a chariot, as described by Ezekiel. But who was responsible for this design? Contrary to those who regard it as expressing the spirit of the Jewish authority, we would point to the undoubted pagan character of the design".

Now what are these "pagan characteristics"? The fact that a deity is depicted and the Jews would not portray their god Yahweh because of the Biblical commandment against graven images. And some sort of a pagan mask is shown.

According to Yehezkel Kaufman ("The Religion of Israel", 1960): "Neither in the Torah nor in the prophets is the matter of representing YHWH a crucial issue . . . Israelite religion rejected from the first figures worshipped as gods; it did not forbid cultic figures which were not objects of adoration". So it was not necessarily impossible for Jews to have portrayed their god. Or, as has been theorized before, this may be a depiction of Yahweh by non-Jews in the general area (e.g. Phoenicians or Philistines of Gaza).

Not only is this a unique portrayal of Yahweh but, in particular it is the vision of the prophet Ezekiel: "And upon the likeness of the throne was the likeness as the appearance of a man upon it . . . This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord". (Ezekiel 1:26-28). The other features of this coin supply ample reinforcement. The deity is shown sitting on a winged wheel just as Ezekiel "beheld . . . one wheel upon the earth by the living creatures". (Ezek. 1:15). There is a very specific description of the wheels: ". . . and their appearance and their work was as it were a wheel in the middle of a wheel". And sure enough this aptly describes the wheel on the Yehud coin, unlike other wheels on coins of the period that show a simple axle and spokes.

The general pose of Yahweh is quite similar to the enthroned Zeus depicted on coins of Alexander the Great *et al*, even to the hawk in his outstretched hand. The bird could even have added meaning here since the four creatures carrying Yahweh each had four faces, including one of an eagle (Ezek. 1:10). Interestingly, only Yahweh's outstretched hand is shown. Could the other arm be under the large wing as proscribed for the four creatures?: "And they had the hands of a man under their wings" (Ezek. 1:8). That the figure is *not* meant to be one of the creatures can be assured by the fact that his feet are clearly visible, while the creatures' "feet were straight; and the sole of their feet was like the sole of a calf's foot" (Ezek. 1:7).

This brings us to the second so-called "pagan symbol" on the coin, described in the literature as an ugly head, or mask, or god Bes. Rather, the head is that of the prophet, for "This was the appearance of the likeness of the Lord. And when I saw it, I fell upon my face, and I heard a voice of one that spake" (Ezek. 1:28). Just as there was no room on the small flan to depict the four creatures there was insufficient space to show Ezekiel's full form and thus only the prophet's head was included. The position of the head is perfectly natural as can be seen from the sculptured Judaeen prisoner scene from Lachish (c. 700 B.C.), on the Black Obelisk from Calah in the British Museum.

And so Ezekiel's vision, which took place in July, 593 B.C. (according to the Encyclopaedia Judaica) was symbolically depicted only a few hundred years later (c. 4th Century B.C.) on this rare treasure of the British Museum.

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